

Improving

Vein Care

& Minimising

Pain



Improving Vein Care & Minimising Pain

This tool-kit aims to support people who inject drugs to care for their veins and make changes to prevent bacterial infections and related health problems. The tool-kit is designed to support positive, non-judgemental conversations.

The cards are divided into different ‘themes’:

- ☉ Handwashing/swabbing;
- ☉ Use of acids to prepare drugs;
- ☉ Use of water for injection preparation;
- ☉ Reuse of equipment;
- ☉ Rotating sites.

You can use the cards in different ways:

1. Choose a card in a ‘theme’ that is most relevant to you/your client
2. Talk through your/ your clients injecting practice
3. Talk about the cards that weren’t chosen. What are the reasons for this?

Remember, you do not have to use all the cards as part of the session.



Produced in collaboration with colleagues at the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) HPRU in Behavioural Science and Evaluation and NIHR ARC West at University of Bristol, Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, Bristol Drugs Project, Bristol City Council, Linnell Communications, Exchange Supplies, and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

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INJECTION

HYGIENE



Wash hands with soap or hand sanitiser **before** injecting.



Wipe the surface before injecting or use a temporary surface if not possible.

Everyone has bacteria on their skin. Wash the injecting site or swab **once** in **one direction, before** injecting.



Handwashing/swabbing

Background

- Breaking the skin with a needle allows bacteria to enter the body.
- Good hygiene practices reduce the risk of developing bacterial infections.
- Wiping after injecting introduces bacteria into the body.

Key steps to reduce harm

- Wash hands with soap or hand sanitiser before injecting.
- Clean surfaces before and after injecting where possible.
- Wash or wipe the site before injecting with a swab in one direction (one swipe per wipe) to keep bacteria off the skin.

HAND Washing

Is important, every time you
prepare and inject drugs.



THE BITS WE MISS when washing our hands.



Sometimes missed.



Often missed.



Handwashing/swabbing

Background

- Breaking the skin with a needle allows bacteria to enter the body.
- Good hygiene practices reduce the risk of developing bacterial infections.
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Key steps to reduce harm

- Wash hands with soap or hand sanitiser before injecting.
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Vein
CARE



Use

Less

CITRIC

Start small: a whole sachet is far too much for most injections.

Use of acids to prepare drugs

Background

- Using too much acid can cause pain and vein damage.
- Vitamin C makes the solution less acidic and is less harmful to veins than Citric Acid.

Key steps to reduce harm

- Use Vitamin C instead of Citric Acid where available.
- Add a small amount of the single-use sachet to the mix. You can add more but you cannot take it away. If the heroin hasn't gone clear at this stage, it contains contaminants which should be filtered out.
- Throw away what's left in the sachet as it's no longer sterile.

Choose

LOW Risk OPTION

Sterile
Water



Cooled boiled
Water



Cold Tap
Water



There's a low risk of infection...

...if you use these sources of water to prepare an injection



Use of water for injection preparation

Background

- There is a hierarchy of risk associated with the type of water used.
- Sharing water increases the risk of bacterial infections.
- Bottled water is not sterile and can introduce bacteria into the body.

Key steps to reduce harm

- The safest water to use is sterile water provided in ampoules.
- If sterile or boiled water is not available, use tap water.
- Avoid sharing water.

Avoid

RISKY

OPTIONS

Hot Tap
Water



Unopened
Bottled
Water*

*High risk
if part used



Shared
Water



Part used
Sterile
Water



Toilet
Water



Puddle
Water



There's a **medium** or a **high** risk of infection...
if you use these sources of water to prepare an injection



Use of water for injection preparation

Background

- There is a hierarchy of risk associated with the type of water used.
- Sharing water increases the risk of bacterial infections.
- Bottled water is not sterile and can introduce bacteria into the body.

Key steps to reduce harm

- The safest water to use is sterile water provided in ampoules.
- If sterile or boiled water is not available, use tap water.
- Avoid sharing water.



Pick up enough
injecting equipment,
so you have **new
equipment** each
time you inject.

Try to **use new injecting
equipment** for every hit
and clean equipment
if this is not possible.



Reuse of equipment

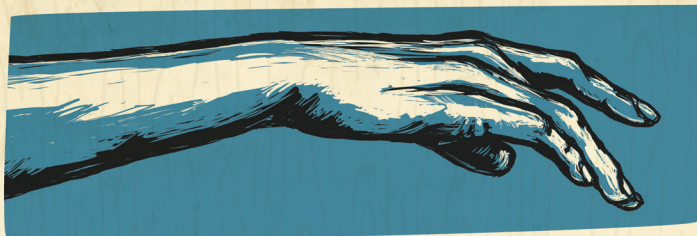
Background

- Reusing needles damages veins and introduces bacteria into the body.
- Using unsterile filters or makeshift cookers (e.g. spoons) introduces bacteria into the body.

Key steps to reduce harm

- Use a new needle for each attempt at finding a vein.
- Re-used needles and syringes can be sterilised with cold water and one capful of bleach.
- Avoid tearing filters as this can increase the fibres in the injecting solution.
- Use chlorhexidine wipes to clean cookers if there is no option to use a sterilised cooker.
- Dispose of all equipment after each use to avoid re-use.





ROTATE YOUR SITES

They will last longer



Get familiar with using different veins - give your best one a rest

Rotating sites

Background

- Rotating means using a different vein each time, not moving up and down the same vein.
- Injecting into femoral veins (e.g. groin) can lead to serious health problems.

Reducing harm

- Use new injecting sites for each injection to give veins time to rest and repair. This keeps veins going for longer.
- Have a break from injecting to give veins a rest. Try smoking, snorting, swallowing, or putting drugs up the bum instead.
- Try learning to inject with non-dominant hand to use veins on both sides of the body.
- Speak to a local drug service for help identifying veins to inject into.
- Wash femoral sites regularly with soap and hot water.